

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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R 252101Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5489
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, AR
SUBJECT: "FOURTH MAN" JITTERS AS DATE OF NEXT
JUNTA MEETING APPROACHES

REF: BUENOS AIRES 2390

SUMMARY. FOR SEVERAL WEEKS NOW THERE HAS BEEN SPECULATION
THAT AT THE JUNTA MEETING OF APRIL 27 A NEW PRESIDENT
WOULD BE ELECTED--THE LONG AWAITED "FOURTH MAN". THERE IS
NOTHING MAGIC ABOUT THAT DATE, AND ALREADY IN FACT
RUMORS ARE THAT A DECISION COULD SLIP. EARLIER ON IT WAS
MASSERA WHO PRESSED FOR A "FOURTH MAN" DECISION, BUT
TABLES HAVE BEEN TURNED AND NOW THE NAVY SEEKS POSTPONEMENT
WHILE VIDELA--APPARENTLY SEEING ALL ADVANTAGE JUST NOW ON
HIS SIDE--URGES A FINAL DECISION. TENSION MOUNTED TO THE
POINT LAST WEEK THAT TWO NEWSPAPERS WERE SUSPENDED FOR THREE
DAYS WHEN THEY APPEARED TO TAKE THE VIEW THAT AN ARMY
DECISION--MADE APRIL 21 TO SUPPORT VIDELA'S PRESIDENCY
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ALTHOUGH NOT YET AFFIRMED BY THE NAVY OR THE AIR
FORCE--NEVERTHELESS CONSTITUTED HIS ELECTION.

DESPITE THE URGENCY TO GET ON WITH SELECTION OF A FOURTH MAN
AND WIDESPREAD UNDERSTANDING THAT IT WILL BE VIDELA, IT IS
DENIED BY NO ONE THAT THE MANNER OF HIS SELECTION, THE
DATE OF INAUGURATION OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

AND THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRESIDENT WITH THE
NEXT JUNTA HAVE IN NO WAY BEEN RESOLVED. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE AT THE TOP LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT
IS MARKED BY A BAD CASE OF THE JITTERS AS THE DATE
APPROACHES FOR THE NEXT JUNTA MEETING, SCHEDULED FOR
THURSDAY, APRIL 27, IN WHICH A MAJOR PRESUMED TOPIC WILL
BE THE "FOURTH MAN QUESTION" AND "THE SCHEME OF POWER."

2. PRESIDENT VIDELA APPEARS TO BE MANEUVERING TO PAVE
THE WAY FOR THE JUNTA'S UNANIMOUSLY PICKING HIM AS
PRESIDENT FOR THE NEXT PERIOD OF GOVERNMENT, 1978 TO
1981 OR 1982. ONE ARGUMENT REPORTEDLY BEING MANIPULATED
BY VIDELA PROPONENTS IN SUPPORT OF AN EARLY DECISION BY
THE JUNTA IS THE LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN ARGENTINE POLITICAL
PROSPECTS ALLEGEDLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE FOREIGN
ENTREPRENEURS WHO RECENTLY MET IN BUENOS AIRES IN A
CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY THE BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION.

3. PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SOURCES HAVE TOLD US THAT VIDELA
HAS WON THE SUPPORT (OTHERS HAVE EVEN CLAIMED HE HAS
BEEN GIVEN A FREE HAND) OF THE ARMY TO NAME CHIEF OF
STAFF, GENERAL VIOLA, HIS SUCCESSOR AS COMMANDER OF THE
ARMY AND ARMY MEMBER OF THE NEXT THREE-MAN JUNTA--A VITAL
PART OF VIDELA'S PLAN TO ASSURE THAT HE HAS SUFFICIENT
POWERS AS "FOURTH MAN" VIS--VISA THE NEXT JUNTA.
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ACCORDING TO SEVERAL RELIABLE ACCOUNTS, THE MAJOR GENERALS
WHO MET LAST FRIDAY DECIDED THAT THE ARMY SHOULD FORMALLY
PROPOSE VIDELA'S CANDIDACY TO THE JUNTA.

4. HOWEVER, A SERIES OF OTHER DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST
FEW DAYS SUGGEST THAT VIDELA DOES NOT YET HAVE ALL HIS
DUCKS IN LINE:

-- A MAJORITY OF THE COUNCIL OF ADMIRALS, ACCORDING
TO POLITICAL SOURCES, HAVE RECOMMENDED TO ADMIRAL MASSERA
THAT HE SHOULD NOT SUPPORT VIDELA. IT IS HARD HOWEVER TO
SEPARATE WHAT MAY BE GENUINE NAVY OPPOSITION TO VIDELA FROM
MASSERA'S BARGAINING TACTICS.

-- RUMORS HAVE CIRCULATED IN JOURNALIST CIRCLES THAT
ADMIRAL MASSERA HAS BEEN PROMOTING THE IDEA THAT HIS HERE-
TOFORE ARCH RIVAL, GENERAL VIOLA, OR SOME OTHER ARMY
GENERAL, SHOULD BE SELECTED FOR THE "FOURTH MAN" SLOT
INSTEAD OF VIDELA. WE DO NOT PLACE CREDENCE IN THIS
RUMOR PER SE, BUT IT IS A NOTEWORTHY EXAMPLE OF THE

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PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE BEING WAGED BEHIND THE SCENES
DESIGNED TO MUDDY THE WATERS AND CAST DOUBT ON VIDELA'S
CANDIDACY.

-- THERE ARE OTHER SIMILAR RUMORS IN CIRCULATION--
THE POINT OF WHICH ARE TO SUGGEST THAT VIDELA IS NOT A
SHOO-IN FOR THE JOB. (FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS SPECULATION
THAT MASSERA'S INTENT IS NOT TO THWART VIDELA'S CANDIDACY,
BUT RATHER TO CAVE IN ULTIMATELY IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME
CONCESSION FROM THE ARMY--PERHAPS THAT OF FORCING THE
SELECTION OF HARDLINER GENERAL SUAREZ MASON AS CHIEF OF
STAFF INSTEAD OF GENERAL VIOLA. OTHERS BELIEVE THAT
MASSERA'S ANTICS ARE MERELY DELAYING TACTICS DESIGNED TO
DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF AS FAR AS POSSIBLE IN THE PUBLIC
MIND FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR VIDELA'S NEXT TERM OF OFFICE
IN ORDER TO FREE HIS HAND FOR A MASSERA POLITICAL CAMPAIGN
IN THE COMING YEARS AS A CIVILIAN POLITICIAN).

-- A LITTLE OVER A WEEK AGO THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL
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OF THE MILITARY JUNTA (WHICH THIS MONTH IS IN CHARGE OF

THE AIR FORCE) ISSUED A STATEMENT THAT THE RESOLUTION OF THE "FOURTH MAN" PROBLEM IS THE EXCLUSIVE COMPETENCY OF THE JUNTA, WHOSE SECRETARIAT HENCEFORTH WOULD BE THE ONLY AUTHORIZED CHANNEL FOR OFFICIAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE OUTCOME OF THIS ISSUE.

5. THESE UNCERTAINTIES HAVE CREATED GREAT TENSION. ON FRIDAY, APRIL 21, THE GOVERNMENT SHUT DOWN FOR THREE DAYS TWO BUENOS AIRES DAILIES, LA OPINION AND CRONICA, FOR CARRYING STORIES IN THEIR FRIDAY EDITIONS THAT THE MAJOR GENERAL OF THE ARMY HAD DECIDED UNILATERALLY TO "PROCLAIM" GENERAL VIDELA AS THE NEXT PRESIDENT. THE GOVERNMENT'S HARSH MOVE AGAINST THE TWO NEWSPAPERS HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS INTENDED TO QUASH SPECULATION THAT THE ARMY HAD DECIDED TO PRE-EMPT A DECISION WHICH WAS THE SOLE PREROGATIVE OF THE JUNTA TO MAKE.

6. SIMILAR EVIDENCE OF TENSION SHOWED IN THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF A MINOR POLITICAL INCIDENT. RADICAL PARTY LEADERS CARLOS PERETTE, A FORMER VICE PRESIDENT, AND ANTONIO TROCCOLI, A FORMER DEPUTY, WERE SUMMONED TO FEDERAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS ON APRIL 23 AND QUESTIONED FOR NINE HOURS ABOUT A COMMUNIQUE WHICH THEY AND 23 OTHER PARTY LEADERS HAD SIGNED THE DAY BEFORE AS A RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT VIDELA'S CALL LAST MONTH FOR A "DIALOGUE". THE TWO LEADERS WERE RELEASED AFTER THEIR STATEMENT WAS TAKEN BY POLICE. THEY TOLD THE PRESS LATER THAT THEY WERE TREATED COURTEOUSLY BY THE POLICE. PARTY SOURCES BLAME INTERIOR MINISTER, GENERAL HARGUINDEGUY, FOR THE INCIDENT. THEY BELIEVE HE ORDERED THE POLICE ACTION WITHOUT CONSULTING FIRST WITH PRESIDENT VIDELA AND THAT HIS INTEMPERATE ORDER REFLECTS THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NERVOUSNESS IN OFFICIAL QUARTERS. THERE IS SPECULATION ALSO IN POLITICAL PARTY CIRCLES THAT HARGUINDEGUY IS WORKING AGAINST VIDELA'S INTERESTS AND THAT HE HAS, AT LEAST UNTIL RECENTLY, ALMOST OPENLY BEEN SUPPORTING FIRST CORPS COMMANDER SUAREZ MASON AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMY INSTEAD OF VIOLA.

7. SERVING TO HEAD UP SPECULATION FURTHER IS THE FACT THAT FULL PLENARY OF ARMY GENERALS MET APRIL 24 UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF GENERAL VIDELA IN PREPARATION FOR THE JUNTA MEETING THIS WEEK, AND A SIMILAR MEETING OF AIR FORCE BRIGADIERS--WHO REPORTEDLY ARE SPLIT OVER SOME OF THE ISSUES--IS SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26. THE ADMIRALS MAY ALSO CONVENE AGAIN THIS WEEK PRIOR TO THE JUNTA MEETING.

8. THE ISSUES TO BE DECIDED BY THE JUNTA ARE: (A) WHO WILL BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT; (B) WHEN WILL HE AND THE NEXT JUNTA TAKE OFFICE; AND (C) WHAT POWERS WILL THE PRESIDENT HAVE VIS-A-VIS THE NEW JUNTA. MASSERA'S ANTICS MAY SUCCEED IN FORCING THE JUNTA TO POSTPONE ITS DECISION THIS WEEK REGARDING THESE ISSUES UNTIL A MORE SUITABLE DATE. MOST POLITICAL SOURCES WE HAVE SOUNDED OUT OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS, HOWEVER, ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT VIDELA WILL ULTIMATELY WIN THE DAY--POSSIBLY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS--AND EMERGE AS THE "FOURTH MAN" CANDIDATE UNANIMOUSLY SELECTED BY THE CURRENT JUNTA MEMBERS--INCLUDING ADMIRAL MASSER. CASTRO

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